

Lauralee Jacks

Clovers  
and  
Fire



**Clovers and Fire**  
**by Lauralee Jacks**

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ISBN-10:1534744347  
ISBN-13:978-1534744349

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# CHAPTER ONE

Once upon a time, in a land far, far away (of course, back then, with no cars, everything over a few miles was far, far away!) there was a beautiful kingdom named Cloveland. Cloveland got its name from all of the fields of green clovers that grew there, and the land was always filled with the sweet smell of the leaves. And, with all of those four leaf clovers scattered in the fields, it brought the kingdom good luck...at least for a while.

Cloveland was governed by King Stefan. King Stefan was a kindly man, with the frizziest mane of hair anybody had ever seen. He was tall and very muscular, with blue eyes as deep as the night sky. Everyone who ever met King Stefan said that he reminded them of a lion in the form of a man (and King Stefan liked this comparison very much!). The king had a wonderful smile when he used it, but unfortunately he did not smile very often. That's because King Stefan was a lonely man, with no Queen to share his life with.

One day, King Stefan called in his Royal Advisor, Gregory. Gregory was more than just an advisor to the king, he was King Stefan's best friend. Gregory always laughed at all of the king's jokes (even the bad ones) and did his best to keep the king cheerful. Gregory had a wonderful laugh, a big belly, rosy cheeks, a nose the size of a small balloon, and the longest beard in the kingdom. It was rumored that a whole family of elves lived in his beard, but no one could confirm it.

"If I do not find a wife soon, Gregory, I will surely die of loneliness! My poor heart grieves for someone to love."

"Your majesty," said Gregory, "I will do all I can to help you find a Queen, I swear it!"

Months passed, though, and still Gregory could not find a suitable maiden for King Stefan. The king got sadder and sadder and soon his health began to fail. The Royal Physician was not encouraged. He informed Gregory that King Stefan was in danger if things didn't get better soon.

"NO!" cried Gregory. "I will not let my friend die this way. If you cannot heal him, I will find someone who can!"

Gregory remembered someone mentioning a healer who made medicines out of the clover, so he set out to find her. When he came to her door, he was struck

by her beauty! She had eyes as green as emeralds and hair as black as the cauldron sitting in her fireplace, boiling a sweet-smelling potion.

“M-m-m-my lady!” Gregory stammered (he always stuttered in the presence of beautiful ladies, much to the annoyance of his wife, around whom he hadn’t stuttered in years). “K-King Stefan is ill and is in need of healing. P-Please say you’ll help.”

“Of course!” said the healer, whose name was Catherine. “I have always wanted to meet King Stefan. I hear he is a very generous man.”

“The best,” said Gregory. “King Stefan and I have been friends for many years, after he rescued me from being eaten by a Fangcow. He is also the godfather for my two year old son Phillip. I would give my life for him.”

Catherine went at once with Gregory to the castle to see King Stefan. He was immediately smitten by her (and if you’ve ever been smitten yourself, you know just how in love he was!). Catherine, in turn, was touched by the king’s condition, and the tenderness she saw in him. She knelt beside the ill king, took his hand, and pledged to take care of him.

Catherine spent several weeks nursing the king back to health with her herbs, and as the king grew healthier, he was smitten even harder by her! He knew he had found true love.

“Will you take my hand in marriage, Catherine?” asked King Stefan one day.

“How could I not give you my hand, when you’ve taken my heart?” replied Catherine.

King Stefan and Lady Catherine were wed, and the king had never been happier. However, he had no heir to his throne. A year passed and still they had no child. Then, one day, while walking in the garden, a beautiful fairy appeared right in front of Lady Catherine (momentarily scaring her to death!).

“Why do fairies need wings when they just pop up in front of you like that?” she thought. The fairy looked like she was about twenty-five years old, although Lady Catherine knew that she was probably more than three hundred years old!

“Greetings, oh gorgeous, beauteous, fabulous, glamorous, glorious fairy!” exclaimed Lady Catherine, for everyone knew you had to kiss up to fairies. With their bad tempers, if you didn’t fuss and fawn over them you might end up as a tree sloth (and Queen Catherine was afraid of heights!).

“You have flattered me well,” said the fairy. “For that, I shall grant you a wish.”

“King Stefan and I have wanted a son,” said Lady Catherine. “That is our truest wish.”

“Granted,” said the fairy. “You shall have a son within the year.” Then the fairy just up and disappeared, leaving Lady Catherine alone again in the garden.

Everything happened just the way the fairy said, and King Stefan and Lady Catherine became the parents of a perfect baby boy.

"I name him Prince Chauncey," said the Queen.

"How about Prince Christian?" suggested the king. "I like that better than Chauncey."

"Christian sounds like a young child's name" argued Queen Catherine. "He will grow up to be a strong, handsome young man. So, Chauncey it is!"

"I like Christian!" shouted King Stefan.

"As Queen of the kingdom of Cloveland, I declare his name to be Chauncey!" shouted back Queen Catherine.

"And as KING of the kingdom of Cloveland, I declare...yes, dear, Chauncey it is," said the King meekly. After all, kings knew you had to kiss up to a Queen even more than a fairy.

## CHAPTER TWO

Prince Chauncey grew up to be a handsome, strong boy. His best friend in the kingdom was Gregory's son, Phillip. Prince Chauncey and Phillip spent several days together riding their horses and swimming in the castle's moat.

Though they were close friends, the two boys were very competitive with one another. Phillip was four years older, but Prince Chauncey was almost as tall and a little bit stronger. Both boys were very athletic and brave, but Chauncey was usually getting the best of Phillip in footraces and fencing. They were being trained in sword fighting by the best swordsman in eight kingdoms, and soon the two boys were excellent fighters. They often talked about going out into the world together and seeking fame, fortune, and especially beautiful maidens.

One day, when Prince Chauncey was twelve, Gregory burst into the Royal Dining Hall, where the royal family was eating dinner.

"Your Majesty!" cried Gregory breathlessly, "The Kingdom is being terrorized by a ravenhog! He was drawn here by the smell of the clover! He's heading this way!"

King Stefan, Lady Catherine, and Prince Chauncey all hurried to the window that normally overlooked the kingdom. However, on this particular day, it overlooked the gigantic snout, demonic black eyes, humongous fat body, twirly tail, gigantic white wings that allowed the ravenhog to fly higher and faster than most birds. Those same wings, while looking soft as a pillow, were actually as sharp as a sword! Very few people had ever encountered a ravenhog in battle and lived to tell about it.

"I must go get my sword and defend the kingdom!" King Stefan shouted.

"No, father! You are too old to be taking on a ravenhog! Let me go out and fight it! I have been trained well, and I am not afraid," said Prince Chauncey.

"Absolutely not!" said King Stefan. "You are the heir to the throne of Cleveland, and if anything happens to me, you are to be the new king. My son, I could not bear it if something happened to you."

With that, King Stefan turned and went out of the room to get ready to battle the terrifying creature. "I WILL NOT let father face that stupid beast alone!"



shouted Prince Chauncey, and he ran out of the room to go get his sword. Once ready for battle, Prince Chauncey ran out to face the dreaded ravenhog.

“Come get me, you foul-breathed, mud-caked, silly-snouted slab of bacon!” Prince Chauncey shouted at the ravenhog. It flew at Prince Chauncey and plowed right into him, knocking Prince Chauncey to the ground with its large body. While Prince Chauncey was on the ground, the monster flew straight down, but Prince Chauncey rolled away just in time. It landed beside Prince Chauncey’s head with a deafening crash. Chauncey rolled back toward the monstrous flying pig and slashed one of its rough-skinned hocks with his sword. The ravenhog snorted mightily, reared up on its two hind legs and swatted at Prince Chauncey with his blunt hooves, which could immediately knock you out with the force of a hammer. Prince Chauncey dodged the deadly feet, then charged forward, sword in his right hand, shield in his left, blocking blows until he could get close enough to the beast to slash it.

“LOOK OUT!” shouted King Stefan, running out of the castle. He had shouted just in time, because Prince Chauncey had forgotten about the ravenhog’s wing. As the ravenhog slashed the deadly appendage at him, Prince Chauncey barely got his shield up. The extremely sharp edge of the wing stuck in the shield, and when the creature moved its wing, it ripped the shield from Prince Chauncey’s hand and threw it several yards out of reach. At this, King Stefan ran to Prince Chauncey’s side. The king struck with his sword and pierced one of the ravenhog’s wings, drawing green blood that oozed from the wound.

“Take my shield!” King Stefan shouted at Prince Chauncey, throwing the large wooden shield to his son. Unfortunately, he had taken his eyes off of the wounded creature. Suddenly the ravenhog landed next to King Stefan and knocked him out with one of his feet. It then stomped on the old king, snorting through his horrid snout.

“GET OFF MY FATHER!” Chauncey screamed, and cut off the beast’s snout with a slash of his weapon. The ravenhog let out a terrible squeal of pain and turned toward Prince Chauncey. As he turned, however, Prince Chauncey had positioned himself so that he slashed its soft underbelly, and, at last, the ravenhog collapsed to the ground, where it died with a final desperate squeal.

Prince Chauncey ran to his injured father, who was not moving.

“FATHER!” Prince Chauncey cried, shaking the unconscious king furiously. “Father, wake up! Don’t die! I am not ready to be King, please don’t die! Wake up!”

Tears began to well up in the young prince’s eyes and fall down his cheeks. He held the injured king in his arms until some servants ran from the castle and

took King Stefan inside to care for him.

Three days went by, and still King Stefan did not wake up. Everyone was terribly worried, and vigils were held by the king's bedside. Queen Catherine never left him, spoon feeding King Stefan clover potions and applying herbs to his wounds. Finally, on the fourth morning after the battle with the ravenhog, King Stefan opened his eyes. Everyone in the room, including Queen Catherine and Prince Chauncey, cried tears of joy.

"My son," the king said weakly, "Come here."

Prince Chauncey timidly approached his father, knelt down, and threw his hands around his father's neck and cried into King Stefan's thick mane of hair.

"It's O.K., my special prince. Everything will be fine," said the king, patting Prince Chauncey on the back. "You are a hero, my boy. I've never seen anyone braver than what you were. You are only twelve years old, and there are men many years older than you who could not defeat a ravenhog! You have the makings of a great future king!"

"Yes," said Queen Catherine. "The boy has definitely inherited many of your talents, Stefan. When he grows up, he will be the greatest king who ever lived."

It took King Stefan several weeks to recover. Finally, though, he was back to his old self, and a kingdom-wide celebration was planned to honor King Stefan and Prince Chauncey. Word had spread about Prince Chauncey's bravery and skill, and everyone was talking about him. In other kingdoms, stories were told and songs were sung about this young hero prince of Cloveland. Prince Chauncey had become instantly famous. The only person that wasn't particularly thrilled about this was Phillip, who began to envy Prince Chauncey's new fame.

"I'm brave and strong, too," Phillip would say to himself. "I just haven't had the chance to show it yet." Phillip swore to himself that somehow he would prove to the kingdom that he, too, was just as much of a hero as Prince Chauncey.

At the celebration, there was merriment such as Cloveland had never seen. Everyone who was able to attend came to the party and gave gifts to King Stefan and Prince Chauncey. Phillip, however, pretended that he was ill so that he did not have to hear everyone singing and bragging about Chauncey.

"I won't rest until I prove myself," said Phillip, and dreaming of his future heroics, he fell asleep.

## CHAPTER THREE

As it turned out, it was about four months later that Phillip got his shot at hero-hood. Prince Chauncey was away on a hunting trip for a few weeks and everything was calm. Phillip was behind his house, practicing throwing daggers, when suddenly a blood-curdling scream rent the silence. Other screams soon followed. Philip took his daggers, ran inside, grabbed his shield and sword, and rushed to see what the commotion was all about. What he saw there froze his blood.

A very ugly troll was in the road, swinging its giant club and raising a big noise. No troll would ever rank highly in the beauty department, Indeed, the most beautiful troll that had ever lived barely registered a 2 on a scale of 1 to 10, but this troll would rank -6! It was twelve feet tall. His head was roughly the size and shape of a gigantic watermelon. He had ears an elephant would envy, bushy eyebrows so thick a bird could build its nest in them (if it could stand the smell of the troll's foul odor), and a large crooked mouth with lips as pale as a toad's skin, and just as warty. His skin was a sickly green color, knees and elbows knotty as a tree root, and he had no hair on his head. Ugly with a capital "U"!

"Yuck!" said Phillip. "Give me a ravenhog any day over this hideous monstrosity."

Terrified citizens of Cleveland were running about, trying to avoid the troll. Phillip, however, stood in the troll's path. The troll roared at Phillip and charged. Phillip threw one of his daggers, but as rough as the troll's skin was, the dagger bounced off of it like a child's toy. The troll stopped, picked up the dagger, and threw it back at Phillip. Phillip screamed and ducked just in time as the dagger flew beside his ear and embedded itself to the hilt in a wooden house. The troll kept coming, picking up Phillip with one hand and throwing him hard into the road. As Phillip lay sprawled on the ground, the troll swung at him with his giant club, but Phillip rolled away and the club struck the ground with such force that it made a crack in the earth.

Phillip jumped up and started running, counting on his speed to outrun the troll. He ran from house to house, ducking low behind them as the troll blundered along, swinging his club and knocking out windows and busting

doors. Phillip lost sight of the troll, made an unfortunate turn, and ran right into the troll's giant leg, who had run the opposite way. The troll reached down, picked up Phillip, and flung him high in the air. Then it caught him on the way down and threw him up again, like Phillip was a human juggling pin. This time, though, when Phillip came down, he swung his sword and cut the troll's hand. Angry and hurt, the troll caught Phillip in his furry hand, turned him upside down, and began to swing at him with his club. Phillip managed to deflect the first blow with his shield, but the second blow caught him in the ribs, taking his breath away. As the troll prepared to swing again, Phillip (who was getting dizzy from being held upside down) swung his sword and cut the troll's arm. Immediately, the troll dropped Phillip on his head. As soon as he hit the ground, Phillip rolled upright and ran behind the huge lug, jumping as high as he could and landing on the troll's back. The troll let out a roar and threw himself back against a house.

"OOOOMPH!" cried Phillip, as what little breath he had regained was knocked out of him again. Twice more the troll threw himself back against a house to try to throw Phillip off of his back, but Phillip endured the pain and kept hanging on. Finally, before the troll could move again, Phillip took his sword and slashed it at the troll's neck. The troll threw one of his hands up and Phillip slashed out and cut the other side of the monster's neck, separating the troll's head from its body.

"TIMBER!" cried Phillip, as he jumped to the ground as the troll fell forward and collapsed in a giant heap.

"Hooray for Phillip! Hooray for Phillip," people shouted as they ran out of their houses and picked Phillip up on their shoulders.

"Phillip is as great a hero as Prince Chauncey!" they shouted. As sore as he was, Phillip had never felt better in his life.

One month after Phillip's heroic battle with the troll, King Stefan held a banquet in his honor. After a feast of mutton glazed with clover jelly and bread pudding for dessert, the king stood up to make an announcement.

"Hear ye, hear ye! As King of Cloveland, I do confer upon Phillip the title of Knight of the Kingdom of Cloveland. From hence forth, he shall be called Sir Phillip!"

Everyone clapped and howled with joy. Phillip was so stunned he nearly fainted, but did not think fainting in front of all those people would look very brave. Even Prince Chauncey stood and applauded, but inside he was feeling a bit of jealousy himself. Sure, he was PRINCE Chauncey, next in line to be KING Chauncey, but he thought the title 'SIR Chauncey' very enviable. After all, a

knight was always known to be brave. A prince, on the other hand, was usually thought to be a spoiled brat who was afraid of a harmless little spidermouse.

As Prince Chauncey grew older, the people of Cloveland did not forget his defeat of the ravenhog, even though six years had now passed. And, with Phillip's legendary battle with the troll, there were two heroes in Cloveland for the people to sing about. Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip's names were spread far and wide across several kingdoms. This was a good thing sometimes, as now there were several young maidens who had heard of them and wanted to meet the handsome young men. However, the drawback was that now every time someone in the kingdom DID have a spidermouse in their house, a rabid dog in their yard, or even a distressed cow, they would run to Sir Phillip or implore Prince Chauncey to help them. As a result, Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip spent nearly all of their time hunting and disposing of ordinary household pests instead of meeting the maidens.

"This knight life isn't all it's cracked up to be," said Sir Phillip as he disposed of another horseroach. "I mean, here we are, two of the most famous people in the lands, and we spend our time fighting nothing more dangerous than a flying jibberbug."

"I know," said Prince Chauncey. "Maybe it is time we go out into the world together and seek wives. After all, Father is getting very old and soon I shall become king. I would like to find a wife before that day comes."

"Absolutely!" exclaimed Sir Phillip. "Love and adventure await us. Of course, my wife will be more beautiful than yours."

"In your dreams, my friend," teased Prince Chauncey, "After all, which of us two is the most handsome, Sir Pig Face?"

"I am, of course," laughed Sir Phillip.

In truth, both of the young men were the catch of the kingdom. Prince Chauncey had naturally curly black hair, green eyes (like his mother), and was sturdy and muscular. And, being a prince, he always wore the latest fashions and was sharply dressed. Sir Phillip wasn't as handsome in the face as Prince Chauncey, but he had a rugged, manly appearance, with a full sandy-blonde mustache, beard, and long hair that he kept tied back. He also had piercing blue eyes that would melt a maiden the second she looked into them. His muscles were a little larger than Prince Chauncey's, and he was also a few inches taller.

When Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip told their families of their plan to go out into the world together, their fathers were thrilled. Their mothers, though, cried and moaned that they were losing their "babies". King Stefan gave them his blessing, along with plenty of money to last a few years. Then, after a few

days of preparation, Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip rode out of town on their horses, dreaming of the adventures and romance that awaited them.

## CHAPTER FOUR

After a full day's ride, Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip grew weary, so they stopped at a small roadside inn. Inside, they were greeted with the comforting smell of good food and the warmth of a fire. After securing a room for the night (for free), the two hungry heroes decided to eat. The innkeeper prepared them a meal of his finest chicken basted in a white wine sauce. They drank and ate heartily, and soon more and more people came to the inn after word spread that Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip were there. Before long, people were asking them to tell about their battles with the ravenhog and the troll. As they recounted their tales, the people would laugh, applaud, cheer, and gasp in astonishment. Then, when they were done, the people would ask them to start over so they could hear it again. Prince Chauncey quickly tired of talking so much, but Sir Phillip was having fun. He kept adding more and more to his story every time he told it, and after about the fifth retelling, the one troll had turned into three and instead of using a sword, he had fought them all barehanded and only suffered a broken fingernail.

"I think it is time we got off to bed," said Prince Chauncey. "The drink is making your tongue silly." He bade the people good night and dragged Sir Phillip away.

"See how the people love us?" said Sir Phillip. "It's amazing! Free room, free food, and I know I saw a couple of beautiful women staring at us. Why didn't we go out into the world a long time ago?"

"Do not get your head in the clouds yet," Prince Chauncey warned. "Take it from me. Being famous can be fun at times, but there will come a time when being famous will not help you win a battle. Only a cool head and steady heartbeat can help you overcome your enemies." With that, Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip went to bed.

The next day went much the same as the first, with a full day's ride followed by a night of free food and drink at an inn. Sir Phillip was again enjoying all of the attention, while Prince Chauncey was a bit more humble about it. Being a prince, he was used to people making a big deal about him, so it wasn't anything new. In truth, it often bothered him.

After a few weeks, they were several kingdoms away from Cloveland. One day, they came to a small town named Kuttburg, which was beside the Argalletta Sea. Here, for the first time, Prince Chauncey had to pay for a room and a meal and no one bothered them afterward. For Prince Chauncey, this was a nice change of pace. Sir Phillip, though, was not very happy.

“Can you believe no one seems to know us here?” moaned Sir Phillip. “It’s like we are two ordinary travelers, not two extraordinary heroes!”

“That is fine with me,” said Prince Chauncey. “Let’s settle here for a while until we decide where to go now. Remember, we need to start searching for wives.”

“Why so far away, though?” asked Sir Phillip. “There were several gorgeous maidens in the kingdoms we passed through that were fawning over us. Why did we not get to know any of them?”

“Because,” said Prince Chauncey, “they just wanted to get to meet us because I am a prince and you are a knight. How can we be sure that it is love that they want and not our fame or fortune? I want a maiden that has never heard of Prince Chauncey or Sir Phillip. That way she can love me truly.”

The next morning, Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip had breakfast at the inn. Sir Phillip was a little glum because no one was coming up to talk with them. It appeared as though that might change, though, when two men came up to their table. One man was rather short and skinny with blond hair that came down over his shoulders. The other was a gigantic human being with a bald head, brown mustache, five chins, and a nasty scar on his neck. His hands were the size of a frying pan. He was so tall that he blocked out much of the light in the room.

“Are you Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip of Cloveland?” asked the smaller man.

“Indeed we are!” said Sir Phillip, giving them his flashiest smile. “What would you like us to do for you? Give you permission to name your firstborn son after us? Draw our family crest on your tunic? Marry your sister?”

“Oh, no, we don’t want any of that,” said the smaller man.

“Then what do you want from us?” asked Sir Phillip.

“Your blood!” shouted the big man. “Follow us out to the street, where we can smear you all over it!”

Sir Phillip’s face turned very pale. Sweat started beading on his forehead. Prince Chauncey, though, seemed very relaxed.

“Fine, we shall follow you out to the street,” Prince Chauncey said. “After all, I wouldn’t want to kill you inside this lovely inn.”



The two men backed out of the inn and into the street, their eyes never leaving Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip.

“Are you sure about this?” whispered Sir Phillip. “I mean, look at the size of that one guy! I’ve ridden horses smaller than him!”

“The troll was larger,” said Prince Chauncey. “Don’t worry. You know what you are doing.”

Once outside the inn, Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip stood face to face with the two men.

“What is your quarrel with us?” asked Prince Chauncey.

“You have ruined our lives! I am Martin, and this is my friend, James,” said the smaller man. “For years we were known throughout the kingdoms as the bravest heroes that had ever lived. Everywhere we went, people would honor us and give us favors. Then, one day, people everywhere were talking about how great Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip were! When I would mention that I had also defeated a ravenhog, people would say ‘Yes, but were you TWELVE?’ When James would defeat five men at once, people would say ‘That’s nice, but Sir Phillip defeated a troll!’”

“Now we are here to prove that Martin and James are better than Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip!” roared James. “We shall fight each other one-on-one. I will fight you, Sir Phillip. Then, after I have mashed you to a pulp, Martin will battle Prince Chauncey!”

“Perfect,” said Prince Chauncey to Martin. “When we do battle, though, try not to slip in your big friend’s blood!”

Prince Chauncey and Martin stepped back and went to opposite sides of the road. A sizable crowd had gathered to watch the battle, and shouts and cheers rose in the air as Sir Phillip and James faced one another. Sir Phillip drew his sword, but James just laughed.

“A sword?! Is that the only way that the great Sir Phillip can defeat me? Swords are for men like Martin and Chauncey, not for me and you. I heard you bragging that you fought three trolls with your bare hands, so if you can do that, I dare you to fight me hand-to-hand.”

Sir Phillip gave his sword to Prince Chauncey to keep. Prince Chauncey could see that Sir Phillip was very nervous.

“Prove to them the man you are,” said Prince Chauncey. “My father would not name a coward a knight, would he?”

Sir Phillip smiled and went to face James. The two men started circling each other, neither one wanting to throw the first punch. Finally, James made the first move, swinging his huge fist at Sir Phillip’s head. Sir Phillip was quicker, though, and easily ducked the blow. Again, James swung. Sir Phillip ducked

under the blow and delivered one of his own, right to James's enormous belly. James groaned, made a step forward, and this time his left jab caught Sir Phillip in the cheek, knocking him down.

"Ouch! This guy is strong!" thought Sir Phillip. "I have to be careful of that fist."

"One punch and you're on the ground already," said James. The crowd was jeering at Sir Phillip and sticking out their tongues.

Sir Phillip scrambled to his feet and threw a hard right hook. It was a blow that would have knocked out many a fighter, but James still stood. He wiped some blood off his lip and spat out a tooth.

"Ah, so you can throw a punch. Well done. Now let's see if you can take one."

James let go with a right cross, connecting with Sir Phillip's ear. Sir Phillip staggered back, reeling from the vicious hit. He would have fallen again, but he was knocked to the edge of the road, and several of the onlookers pushed him back.

"Get in there and fight! We want to see how tough you really are!" men shouted at Sir Phillip. Sir Phillip took a few seconds to collect himself, then rushed at James. James easily stepped to the side, and the off-balance Sir Phillip found himself down in the dirt again.

With Sir Phillip on the ground, James saw a chance to finish him. However, just as he got to where Sir Phillip lay, Sir Phillip got to his knees and wrapped his strong arms around James's legs. James toppled to the ground face-first. Phillip jumped up, fell on top of James and started punching him over and over.

"Enough!" shouted James, covering his head and starting to bawl like an infant. "Please get off of me. Please!"

Sir Phillip said, "Do you declare me the winner?"

"Yes, yes, you win!" moaned James.

Sir Phillip got up, dusted himself off, then reached down and helped James up off of the ground. James sniffled, wiping his nose on his tunic.

"I thought you were a tough guy," said Sir Phillip. "Now here you are mewling like a kitten."

The crowd was now cheering for Sir Phillip and laughing at James.

"The big bad man is now a little baby! The only thing he could win is a mutton eating contest! Yea for Sir Phillip!"

James slinked off to where Martin was standing, then sunk to the ground and hung his head in defeat.

"You, Prince Chauncey, will not be so lucky as to have such an easy fight," said Martin. "I am one of the best swordsmen around, and now that Sir Phillip

has humiliated my friend, I will make sure you pay dearly.”

“On the contrary,” said Prince Chauncey. “You will be humiliated even more!”

Both men drew their swords and met each other in the middle of the road. It was immediately clear that both Martin and Prince Chauncey were master swordsmen. When one would make a charge, the other would parry and turn the fight in his favor. Then, he would have to be on the defensive because the other would regain his form and dangerously charge again. The crowd was enjoying the melee immensely, cheering loudly as each swing was thrown and blocked. Back and forth the battle went. Neither man could gain the upper hand for several minutes, but if there was one advantage Prince Chauncey had, it was the fact that he was in better condition, and soon Martin began to tire. He made a slight miscalculation with his parry. Prince Chauncey took advantage of that and sliced the front of Martin’s trousers, where they dropped to the ground. There Martin stood in his bloomers, his pants around his ankles, and his face redder than a flamehen! The assembled crowd howled with laughter and delight.

“Who is more embarrassed now, Martin? You or James?” Prince Chauncey boasted.

“Please,” Martin pleaded. “I have been shamed in public. Kill me quickly. I shall never recover from this.”

“I have no ill will toward you or your ogre of a friend,” said Prince Chauncey. “Since you rudely interrupted my breakfast, I am starving. You and James can buy our meal at the inn.”

“Prince Chauncey,” said Martin, gathering up his trousers, “You have proven yourself my superior, and I humbly submit myself to you.”

Feasting on a plate of lamb, eggs, and a bowl of whey, Prince Chauncey spoke to Martin. “Sir Phillip and I are in search of a good wife. I have seen many a fine woman since leaving Cloveland, but I am in search of someone special. Well traveled heroes like yourself must have encountered plenty of beautiful women. Can you tell me of any that might be worthy of my attentions?”

“Yes, I will tell you,” Martin said. “James and I have traveled far and wide over more kingdoms than I can count. We have seen all manner of maidens that would make good and proper wives for such worthy men as yourselves. By far the most worthy, though, is in a magical kingdom, between this world and the world of beyond, in the kingdom of Dreamland. There lives the eldest daughter of the great King Lyric, whose name is Cassandra. Her beauty is unmatched by any maiden in this world.”

“Dreamland?” asked Prince Chauncey. “Perhaps I landed a blow to your head. You are talking silliness.”

“No, I could not tell you untrue,” said Martin. “For, since you have spared our lives, James and I are in your service for life.”

“Do you know the way to Dreamland?” asked Sir Phillip.

“Indeed I do, but it is very dangerous. It is on a magical island in the middle of the Argalleta Sea. Behind a mystical shroud of mist, you enter the waters of Dreamland. These waters protect the island with deadly whirlpools. And, if you make it through the whirlpools there is a fearsome sea monster that will swallow a man whole. My heart trembles at the thought of going there.”

“I will release you and James from your servitude,” said Prince Chauncey, “after you find me a ship and crew willing to take me and Sir Phillip there.”

“Yes, oh gracious Prince Chauncey!” cried Martin. “I will do as you wish.”

“Very good,” said Prince Chauncey. “Now, Sir Phillip, let us go prepare for the voyage.”

“Aren’t you afraid of the sea monster?” asked James.

“No, there is only one creature I fear in this world,” Chauncey said.

“What creature is that?” Sir Phillip asked.

“Cats!” said Prince Chauncey. “When I was eight, I got in a scuffle with the son of our stablehand. I won the fight, but as I turned and started to walk away, he grabbed a stray cat and threw it on my back. I had scars for weeks! Since then I have had nightmares of the furry felines. A sea monster is a cute, fuzzy teddy bear compared to a cat!”

Martin, James, and Sir Phillip shook their head in amazement.

“We’ll be sure to protect you from any vicious balls of fur we come across,” said Martin. “Your ship and crew will be ready within a week.”

## CHAPTER FIVE

Four days after Prince Chauncey ordered Martin and James to find a ship and crew to take him and Sir Phillip to Dreamland, Martin returned and stated that he had found one.

“The way is so treacherous that I had to promise the crew a lot of money,” said Martin.

“Very well, I shall pay it,” Prince Chauncey said.

Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip packed their belongings and set off for the harbor, where Martin said the ship would be waiting. It was a fine, sturdy boat, made of strong wood and massive sails. When they had boarded the ship, the crew pulled up anchor and they were away. The crew was made up of fifteen men plus the Captain.

“A good weather we have for sailin’,” said the Captain to Prince Chauncey. “The sea is goin’ to be calm an’ the wind be blowin’ just right.”

“How far is it to Dreamland?” asked Sir Phillip.

“About three days sail,” said the Captain. “I’ve never been there myself, but I know where the magical mist lies.”

“What do you know about the sea monster that awaits us?” asked Prince Chauncey.

“Not much,” said the Captain. “I only know by what I’ve been told that it is a serpent-like creature that is sixty feet long an’ has fangs as long an’ sharp as a short sword. I hope we do not meet up with it. My main concern is getting through th’ whirlpools. We should have the men to row out of one, but I do not know, as I’ve never seen them. A wrong move could send us to the bottom of th’ sea.”

“Sir Phillip and I will do everything in our power to defend this ship,” said Prince Chauncey. “You are a generous man for taking us to Dreamland.”

“Generous?” said the Captain. “No, not generous, my boy. Greedy be more like it, with the money you have hired us for. HA HA!”

The Captain walked to the front of the boat, leaving Sir Phillip and Prince Chauncey alone.

“I’ll tell you one thing,” said Sir Phillip. “If we’ve got to battle whirlpools and sea monsters for this girl, Martin had better be telling the truth about her

beauty, or so help me I'll have his head!"

"Why are you worried about Cassandra's beauty, since it is I who will win her," teased Prince Chauncey.

"If you indeed win her, it will be only because I have not tried to woo her," said Sir Phillip. "Do you think I would just step aside and let you marry a beautiful maiden without competition? If so, then the damp sea air must have doused your brain!"

Prince Chauncey smiled. "Your confidence is amazing, though misguided. When Cassandra and I wed, you shall be the best man."

"I already AM the best man," said Sir Phillip.

The sea was calm the next two days (although Prince Chauncey's and Sir Phillip's stomachs were not. Since they both had never been at sea, they spent much of the time seasick). The third day of the voyage, though, brought ominous storm clouds and rough waters. The Captain came and talked to Prince Chauncey.

"We should be gettin' close to the magical mist soon. The weather is getting strong, as if th' ocean and th' air itself were tryin' to keep us away."

"Do not lose heart, my good man," said Prince Chauncey. "The boat and the crew are strong, and my will is stronger than these both."

Soon after the noon meal, a man cried out from the crow's nest.

"There's the magical mist straight ahead!"

All of the men strained to see. Because it was raining, it was hard to distinguish between the angry waves and the grey sky. Soon, though, they all saw it. The mist itself seemed alive, as there were swirls of air and water constantly stirring inside it. Men started to tremble in fear as they sailed straight toward the heart of it.

As they grew nearer and nearer, they saw that the swirls were not air and water. Instead, they were ghosts. Hundreds....no, thousands of ghosts floating and flowing within the shroud of sea foam and darkened light, as if the sun itself could not penetrate the gruesome atmosphere. The men of the crew cried out, and even Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip were afraid.

When the ship sailed fully into the mist, the air became as cold as the grave. The sun was veiled and very little light made it through. All about the terrified sailors were the ghostly specters, swooping around the ship's mast and melting through the wood below deck. The wind that had carried their progress this far was suddenly gone and the boat was dead in the water, not moving an inch. As ghastly as they were, their sorrowful cries were worse. The sound chilled every man's heart, and many covered their ears to try and block out the cacophony of noise.

“Men, to your oars!” shouted the Captain. “Do not be afraid! Do your duty! To the oars!”

The men went to the oars and started to row, but the air and the water were so thick, the boat made hardly any headway. Suddenly, a loud voice was heard on the wind.

“Who enters the misty realm of the Legion of the Dead?”

“Prince Chauncey, Sir Phillip, and our ship of brave, hearty sailors,” shouted Prince Chauncey to the invisible entity, “and we are not afraid.”

“Speak for yourself,” muttered Sir Phillip, who was trembling all over.

“Your oars will do very little good, as we are the ones holding back your ship,” rumbled the voice. “We are the remains of all of the sailors who have been consumed by the whirlpools. Our fate will be your fate, too.”

“We are aware of the dangers of the water and we will not let you frighten us,” Prince Chauncey said.

When he said this, the ghosts shrieked and flew at and through the men. Panicked, the men dropped their oars and started waving their arms and screaming in fear. The ship began to move again of its own mysterious power, but the men did not seem to notice, as they were vainly trying to swat at the swirling ghosts. The ship started picking up speed, but there was no wind. Sir Phillip realized what was going on.

“Prince Chauncey! The ghosts are dragging us into a whirlpool!”

Prince Chauncey looked and saw that the water around the ship was indeed swirling and the ship was turning toward the center of the whirlpool, where a black vortex of water was waiting to take them under. Prince Chauncey looked towards the crewman who was supposed to be steering the ship and saw him flat on the deck, having fainted in fright. Running toward the abandoned post, Prince Chauncey took the wheel and steered it away from the deadly eye of the whirlpool.

“Sir Phillip, you’ve got to rally the men and make them row before the ghosts pull us into the middle and it is too late!” shouted Prince Chauncey.

Sir Phillip went to the cowering men, yelling at them to be brave, that the ghosts could not harm their bodies. Some men picked up their oars and started rowing hard. Soon others followed, and with a giant effort, they put their combined strength to save themselves from the terrors of the raging, swirling whirlpool. Try as they might, though, the water seemed stronger than the men.

“Take the wheel and continue to steer out of this,” Prince Chauncey told the Captain. When the Captain took over and wrestled the wheel for control, Prince Chauncey ran to the bow of the boat and yelled to the air.

"Leader of the Dark Legion of the Dead, you have shown the power of your force. What must we do to release your grip on our small ship?"

"We are doomed to forever roam the Argeletta Sea and send more men to the deep. It is a curse that can only be broken by the prayers of a man who is true and good."

Prince Chauncey lifted his arms. "To the God of the visible and invisible, I ask your mercy on this lost legion of souls. I humbly beseech thee to release them of their curse and receive the peace that they are due."

For a time nothing happened, but then the cries of the dead began to fade. Light flooded the air around the ship and the ghosts faded into thin air. The men at the oars shouted in joy as their oaken panels caught and steered them back into calm waters and the mist evaporated around them.

With the clear air, it was now easier to avoid the whirlpools. Some were dangerously close to each other, and if it weren't for the experienced crew and the Captain, the ship would have been devoured. After the whirlpools had thinned, Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip breathed a sigh of relief.

"Wow, that was intense," said Sir Phillip.

"You're not kidding," said Prince Chauncey. "I just hope that we don't have to deal now with the sea monster."

"After those ghosts, how scary could a sea monster be?" said Sir Phillip.

"Uhhhhhhh—pretty scary!" said Prince Chauncey, his voice shaking. "Look behind you!"

Sir Phillip turned and looked face-to-fang with the most hideous, foulest creature he had ever seen. It did indeed resemble a sea serpent, in that it was long and shaped like a snake, except this monster would have eaten other sea serpents for brunch! It was at least eighty feet long and as big around as an ancient tree trunk. Gills like a fish stuck out of the sides of its head, and a long mane of seaweed matted hair fell down its back. The thing had sharp, brown scales and orange eyes that held pupils of blackest evil. Drool (or maybe poison) dripped off the end of the fierce fangs.

"AAAAAAAAGGHHHH!" screamed Sir Phillip. "SEA MONSTER!"

Of course, Sir Phillip was not saying anything that the crew did not already know, as they were screaming twice as loud as Sir Phillip.

"Yummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm," hissed the gigantic serpent, "Fresssh sssssailorssss! Itssssss been too long sssssssssince I've eaten a man insssstead of fissssssh! Which one of these tassssty sssssailorssss sssshall I eat firsssst?"

"You're not eating any of us!" shouted Prince Chauncey. "In fact, I was just wondering how I would like my sea monster cooked, medium or well-done?"



“HA!” laughed the sea monster, “You look like a tassssty one. YOU sssshall be my firsssst ssssnack.”

The sea monster flicked its head toward Prince Chauncey. As it neared, Prince Chauncey dropped to the deck, flat on his back. He slashed his sword at the sea monster’s neck, but the creature’s scales were so tough that his sword simply bounced off of them. Meanwhile, Sir Phillip and some of the crew were attempting to stab the sea monster with their own swords.

“The scales are too hard to cut through!” yelled Sir Phillip.

Most of the men, realizing their peril, ran below the deck in fright, leaving only Prince Chauncey, Sir Phillip, and a few others to try to defeat the beast.

“We have got to injure it somehow,” said Prince Chauncey. “Everyone strike at its eyes!”

When the sea monster would swing its head to strike at someone, the fighters would aim at the evil orbs, but the snake-like thing was so fast it was next to impossible to hit them. Unfortunately, one of the men was a little too slow. The sea monster lashed its tongue out, wrapped it around the crewman, and swallowed him. Sir Phillip and Prince Chauncey managed to strike the tongue, which was soft and meaty. The sea beast roared in pain and coiled away, but it quickly stuck its head forward again to try and snag Prince Chauncey. As it did, Sir Phillip swung his sword, missing the sea monster’s eyes again. Instead, he sliced off a foul swath of the creature’s mangy hair. Suddenly, Sir Phillip had an idea.

“Prince Chauncey! Keep the sea monster focused on you for a little while. I’ve got a plan!”

“It had better be a fast plan,” said Prince Chauncey. “I’m not sure how long I can keep dodging that thing!”

“Hey, snake bait!” yelled Prince Chauncey to the Sea Monster, “You’re nothing but an overgrown earthworm. You can’t catch me!”

“I’m sssstill hungry!” hissed the sea monster. “I want you for dessssert!”

The snake lashed out at Prince Chauncey again and again. Each time, Prince Chauncey would dodge him by running behind the ship’s beam or ducking behind some barrels on the deck. Sir Phillip, though, was busy climbing the ladder to the crow’s nest. When he reached the top of the mast, he found himself poised above the sea monster’s head. While the creature was distracted with Prince Chauncey, Sir Phillip leaped onto the sea monster’s back, grabbed onto its hair, and plunged his sword through its mane. The snake screamed horribly, thrashing about. Barely hanging on, Sir Phillip stabbed the snake through the back of its neck twice more. The third blow did the sea monster in. It let out

one last scream and flopped in the water, dead. Sir Phillip was thrown off of the monster's back and into the water.

"Help!" cried Sir Phillip.

Prince Chauncey dove into the water head first. Before long he had reached Sir Phillip, who was struggling to keep above water. Prince Chauncey threw an arm around his shoulder and with a mighty effort brought him back to the ship's side, where one of the crewmen threw down a rope and pulled them aboard.

"Whew! Thanks, my Prince," said Sir Phillip. "You are truly my best friend."

"Since you sent that sea monster after ME while you climbed that crow's nest, I should have let you drown," joked Prince Chauncey. "By the way, how did you know where the sea monster's weakness was?"

"Well," said Sir Phillip. "When I accidentally cut off some of its hair it made me think that hair could only grow out of soft skin which was not covered in scales. So, of course, that would be where it was most vulnerable."

"My father knew what he was doing when he named you a knight," said Prince Chauncey. "That was very smart."

"Thank you," Sir Phillip said.

"Don't let it swell your ego," laughed Prince Chauncey. "I still think you're a knucklehead!"

The Captain came up to Prince Chauncey. "If I had known the the whole truth about what it would take to get you two to Dreamland, I would have never agreed to bring you here!"

"Don't worry," said Prince Chauncey. "Now that the sea monster has been defeated you should have no more trouble."

Those words turned out to be true, as one hour later they saw the kingdom of Dreamland in the distance.

"Well, there is the home of my future bride," said Sir Phillip.

"Only if that bride isn't named Cassandra," Prince Chauncey said.

The two friends playfully slapped each other on the shoulder and prepared to depart the ship. When the ship got within half a mile of the shore, it dropped anchor. Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip got into a small rowboat and soon were setting foot in the majestic kingdom of Dreamland.

## CHAPTER SIX

The island kingdom of Dreamland was lush with tropical vegetation and wonders of all kinds to draw one's attention. The entire kingdom was unlike anything they had ever imagined. They saw unicorns galloping across the fields, and plants and trees that laughed and sang. The scenery, though, was dominated by an immense castle. Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip set out towards it, for they reasoned that was the best place to find a Princess. However, the closer they got to the castle, the more they saw signs of trouble. A village had several houses and buildings burned down and the people there were wary of Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip. There was no talking or laughter, like they were expecting some dread event. The three other villages they passed seemed the same way, with several buildings and homes razed to the ground and the people frightened.

"It seems all is not well here," whispered Sir Phillip to Prince Chauncey.

"Not well at all," agreed Prince Chauncey. "It is truly a beautiful and magnificent kingdom, but there is something going on that has the people acting like skittish little mice."

Before long, Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip were on the main road leading to the castle. Its massive stone turrets towered over two hundred feet into the air. Multi-colored pennants flew in the gentle breeze atop the battlements. The moat was as wide as a river and the castle was only accessed by a large wooden drawbridge that was open, but was heavily guarded by five giant warriors with long swords and spears. As Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip were crossing the drawbridge, one of the men stepped forward.

"Halt! Who are you and what is your business?"

"My name is Prince Chauncey, from the kingdom of Cloveland," said the prince, with a low bow. "I am here to ask King Lyric's eldest daughter Cassandra's hand in marriage."

"Ah, that is certainly interesting," said the guard, turning toward Sir Phillip. "And you are?"

"Sir Phillip, knight of Cloveland. I am also here to propose to Cassandra."

"Well, now, it seems to me as if there is only one of you that she can choose," the guard said. "Never mind, King Lyric will find out which of you is

more worthy to marry her. You may pass into the castle, but you must leave your weapons here with us. We will give them back to you when you leave or until the king commands.”

Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip gave the guard their weapons and entered into the humongous castle of King Lyric, ruler of Dreamland.

Inside, they saw glorious and magical rooms. Curtains drew back without anyone pulling them, revealing a beautiful, serene sunset that looked as if a group of angels had just granted a glimpse into Heaven. Chandeliers burned brightly, although there were no candles in the sconces.

“Wow,” said Prince Chauncey. “This is incredible!”

Sir Phillip touched a statue in admiration, but when he did the statue opened its eyes, screamed hideously, and leaped off its pedestal to cower in the corner of the room.

“May I help you?” asked a deep-voiced man, coming from a large curved stairwell.

“We seek an audience with King Lyric,” Prince Chauncey said. “We have travelled far to pay the King homage and to win his favor so that one of us may marry the maiden Cassandra, whose fame has spread to the great kingdoms across the sea.”

“I shall tell the king of your presence,” said the man, bowing deeply. Away he went, back up the stairs. Soon, he returned and motioned.

“King Lyric will see you now. Follow me.”

The man led Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip up the stairway, past a hallway that was lined with ancient portraits and paintings, and into the throne room. The room was extremely elegant, with dark tapestries decorating the walls and statues of past kings adorning the side of the massive hall. In the back of the room, King Lyric sat on his throne. He was a tall man, with deep-set hazel eyes and long black hair that didn’t show any signs of graying, even though King Lyric was almost as old as King Stefan. The crown on his head was blazoned with diamonds and rubies in several sizes, sending their reflected light dancing on the walls. Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip approached King Lyric and bowed.

“Oh great King Lyric, I am Prince Chauncey from Cleveland, and this is Sir Phillip, our best knight. We have heard that you are looking for a worthy husband for your eldest daughter, Cassandra. I am here to seek her hand.”

“As am I,” said Sir Phillip, stepping in front of Prince Chauncey. “I am sure you will find me to be the most worthy.”

King Lyric glared at Sir Phillip and croaked, “The only thing you are worthy of right now is a good flogging! How dare you step in front of your Prince!”

(Even though King Lyric's name suggested beautiful music, in truth he sounded more like a toad).

Sir Phillip quickly jumped back behind Prince Chauncey with a dogged look. Prince Chauncey pretended to be stern toward Phillip, but inside he was laughing at how King Lyric made Sir Phillip look foolish.

“You are starting on a bad foot with me, Sir Phillip,” came King Lyric’s grating voice again. “However, I will give you and Prince Chauncey a chance to prove your worth.”

“Anything, oh wonderful, gracious, merciful, golden-voiced King Lyric,” stammered Sir Phillip, trying his best to make amends with His Highness.

“As you may have seen as you passed some of our villages, we face a serious threat,” said King Lyric. “Every night of the full moon, the great dragon Kronius terrorizes our land. Kronius’s goal is to eventually destroy us. The next full moon is tomorrow evening, and I will send one of you out to defeat Kronius. If he does not succeed, then I will send the other of you the next night of the full moon. The one who defeats Kronius and saves our Kingdom will marry my daughter. Only a man who can defeat a dragon is worthy enough for her hand. Many men have sought her favor, and all have died fighting Kronius. Maybe you two will reach the same fate!”

“And maybe you will get a new son-in-law!” said Prince Chauncey.

“You two shall meet my daughter Cassandra at dinner tonight,” said King Lyric. “I will have the servants prepare your rooms. You are dismissed.”

The man that had brought them to the throne room (who introduced himself now as Mr. Hillsey, King Lyric's butler) led them to a couple of bed chambers in the east wing of the palace. The rooms were very comfortable, with expensive fine-carved furniture. The beds were very soft, and the magical covers would tuck a person in when they laid down at night and make themselves back when one got up in the morning.

That night, Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip made their way to the Royal Dining Room. For a long time, they were the only ones at the table.

“I’m ravenous!” said Sir Phillip. “I mean, I’m looking forward to meeting Cassandra and all, but I don’t want to starve to death before we lay eyes on her!”

As soon as he had said this, Cassandra walked gracefully into the room. Both men promptly forgot about eating, for they could not keep their eyes off of her. Cassandra was indeed the most beautiful girl in the world, with dark flowing brown hair, eyes the color of deepest turquoise, and a face so lovely that it glowed with a radiance all its own.

“Whoa!” Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip said at once.

Cassandra stared back at them, silently trying to make up her own mind about the two would-be husbands. She liked Sir Phillip's strong build and ruddy complexion, but her heart was really fluttering over Prince Chauncey. There had been several suitors before that had tried to win her, but none had ever captured her attention as much as this young prince from Cloveland!

"It is good to meet you both," Cassandra said. "I understand that my father has required a very difficult task of you. Sometimes I wish he wouldn't do that, for every man that has tried to fight Kronius in the past has ended up as dragon fodder. Surely, if the same happens to you two, I will become an old maid."

"Don't worry, Cassandra, said Sir Phillip. "I'll slay the dragon!"

Cassandra looked amusingly at Sir Phillip. She wished Prince Chauncey would say something, but he was simply gazing at her in silence. It was obvious that he had fallen head over heels in love with her.

After nibbling on their food and making awkward small talk, Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip said goodnight to Cassandra and went to bed. Neither of them could sleep very well that night. Prince Chauncey was mooning over Cassandra, and all of his thoughts were taken with her. Sir Phillip's thoughts, however, were filled with imaginings of Kronius, as the next night and either he or Prince Chauncey would have to battle the great dragon. It was a real possibility that one or both of them would be burned to a crisp.

When at last dawn arrived, Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip met King Lyric for breakfast. They were both disappointed to see that Princess Cassandra did not join them.

"Good morning," the King croaked cheerfully.

"Good morning, Highness," replied Prince Chauncey. He tried to hide his dismay as he asked, "Where might Cassandra be this beautiful day?"

"Cassandra and her younger sister, Isabella, have their lessons to attend to today. She wishes me to pass along her fondest good luck regards, and hopes that Kronius shall not burn you too darkly. Hopefully one of you will become Cassandra's new fiancée and we can hold a joyous wedding, but looking at the both of you, more likely another funeral!"

Prince Chauncey frowned all through breakfast, as his heart was wounded that he would not see Cassandra that day. All of his life he had not known of her, and he had been happy. Now that he had met Cassandra, though, he could not imagine spending another day without her. In his eyes, Princess Cassandra was less of a woman and more of a goddess! He vowed to himself that he would kill Kronius or die trying, as life without Cassandra wouldn't be worth living anyway.

Prince Phillip was also heartsick. Cassandra was gorgeous, and he wanted to win her for his own bride. To do that would take defeating a dragon in battle, and people would talk about him for ages if he managed that feat! Plus, he would marry a princess and by rights would become a prince himself.

When breakfast had been eaten, King Lyric said, "Tonight is the first night of the full moon. Prince Chauncey, in honor of your rank, I have chosen you as the first one to try and slay Kronius. Get some rest today, as tonight you will need all of your strength. Good luck, and for the sake of the kingdom, I hope you succeed."

"Thank you, King Lyric," said Prince Chauncey, getting up from the table. "I pledge to do all that I can in service to your fair kingdom."

Sir Phillip was troubled. On the one hand, he certainly did not want the dragon to kill his friend. On the other, if Prince Chauncey defeated Kronius, he would get to marry Cassandra, and Sir Phillip didn't think he could stand for that. All of his life he had lived in the shadows of Prince Chauncey's achievements, no matter how great his own. Anger began to seethe in Sir Phillip, and he almost wished that they had never come to this place.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

During the rest of the day, Prince Chauncey became more and more anxious. He began to prepare to fight the dragon by practicing with his sword and readying his mind for battle.

When it was sunset, he donned his sword, grabbed his shield, and went to the nearby village to meet the great dragon, Kronius. Prince Chauncey waited in nervous agony for an hour and a half. For as brave as he was, he had only heard tales of the great flying monsters known as dragons, and had certainly never anticipated meeting one in battle. Was he about to die a horrible death?

As the moon came upon the horizon, bright white and round as a pancake, Prince Chauncey felt the great beast's approach long before he could see it. The air took on a heavy feel, and an unnatural wind swirled through the night. There came a sound of massive wings in flight - WHUMP WHUMP WHUMP! Suddenly, a jet of flame brought darkness to light as the dragon swooped above the cottages and fields, and readied itself for more deadly mayhem.

Villagers were screaming, horses neighed in a helpless panic, and all were running for safety wherever any could be found. Prince Chauncey looked to the sky, and all of the blood drained from his face, leaving him as pale as one of the ghosts in the mist as the great dragon, Kronius came into full view. He was twenty feet wide and over sixty feet long. Horns, over five feet in length, grew out of the top of the dragon's head. Kronius's snout was flaring, smoke boiling from its nostrils. Green scales covered his entire body, and each foot and claw ended with talons so sharp they could tear through metal. And, both of the dragon's yellow evil eyes were now focused on Prince Chauncey.

Kronius breathed another stream of flame into a nearby house, and the wooden abode burst into an immediate fireball. Prince Chauncey grabbed his sword and ran to fight the dragon. Kronius landed and the ground shook under his weight. As Prince Chauncey swung his sword, Kronius swiped one of his great claws, knocking the sword away. Prince Chauncey leapt to recover it, doing his best to use the cover of his shield to stay alive. A blast of flame scorched his shield as Kronius blew a jet of extremely foul smelling burning air, nearly singeing off all of the hair on Prince Chauncey's face.



"PHEW! Did you forget to brush your fangs today?" yelled Chauncey. He retrieved his sword from where it lay, kept his shield up in ready, and charged again. This time, when Kronius swiped his talon, Prince Chauncey was strong enough to hold onto his sword.

"This is for harming this village!" Prince Chauncey shouted. His sword did little damage, but he felt he may have loosened a scale or two.

"And THIS is for the kingdom of Dreamland and their king!" This time there were some green scales on the ground after Prince Chauncey's swing. Kronius swung his head downward and tried to spear Prince Chauncey with one of its horns, but missed badly.

"AND THIS IS FOR CASSANDRA!" Prince Chauncey screamed with all the air he had in his lungs. With a mighty slash at the now exposed area where he had cut off some scales, Prince Chauncey felt the skin give as Kronius let out a deathly howl of pain and surprise. Black, thick blood oozed from the wound, and where it landed on the ground, it scorched the earth like acid. His green belly began to glow, and Prince Chauncey took that to mean that he was about to spit more fire, so he ran behind one of the rock walls of a house that had been destroyed earlier by the dragon. This time, the wall easily absorbed the heat of the dragon's breath, and it gave Prince Chauncey a few moments to catch his own. He had stung Kronius, but it would take a lot more than a scratch to kill him. His best hope was to get close to Kronius so that he would be able to hopefully avoid his fire breath and soften the stabs from the talons. He would have to strike two or three blows and run again to safety behind an obstacle for better, longer cover.

Prince Chauncey breathed deeply and rushed for a second meeting with Kronius. This time was worse, as Kronius kicked out hard with his foot and Prince Chauncey felt his shield crack with the force. He managed to make a few more small scratches, but Kronius went unharmed. Prince Chauncey dove behind a small, low rock wall surrounding a villager's backyard garden. There were watermelons, beans, tomatoes, corn, and several other vegetables that looked ripe for the picking.

"You can't get me!" yelled Prince Chauncey. "I've fought ladybugs more frightening than you!"

Kronius roared and flew up into the sky to prepare for another assault on the small town. Prince Chauncey watched him rise, and then...THUNK! Something hard bounced off of his right shoulder. He looked back to see a potato laying close.

"What?!..." SPLAT! This time a tomato slammed against his cheek. His face was instantly sticky with juice and seeds running down his jaw. He turned

around just in time to catch an ear of corn that was flying toward his head like a bolt from a crossbow. He dropped it on the ground as someone emerged from the row of corn where they had been hiding. The man was tall and very muscular. A look of rage was on his face, and he was holding a huge watermelon above his head, ready to throw it at Prince Chauncey. That man was Sir Phillip!

Prince Chauncey stared in amazement, Kronius momentarily forgotten.

"Sir Phillip! Have you gone mad?"

"Mad for Cassandra," said Sir Phillip, tossing the melon at Prince Chauncey. It bounced off his shield and the shield, which had been weakened by Kronius's foot, split the rest of the way in two. Prince Chauncey threw it down, picked up the potato, and chucked it back at Sir Phillip, hitting him square in the nose.

"I demand you to stop this right now!" said Prince Chauncey.

"Yes, that's exactly what you want me to do," said Sir Phillip. "Stop right now and let you win Cassandra's hand. I cannot let you do that."

"In case you don't remember, there's a deadly dragon around here?" Prince Chauncey said.

Kronius, for his part, was turning another house or two into kindling as he reigned from above.

Sir Phillip pulled his own sword and shield and leaped over the garden wall. "I DO remember, and I will kill it, and King Lyric will make me Prince. Then I will finally be your equal."

Kronius spotted Sir Phillip and dove toward him from the sky, claws out. Sir Phillip stood his ground, lashing out with his own sword and cutting off one of the dragon's claws. Kronius roared again and banked back into the sky.

"Aww. Did the wittle dwagon break a nail?" Sir Phillip taunted.

Sir Phillip felt a hard shove from behind. He stumbled forward and nearly lost his footing.

"Lucky strike! Now you had better take cover because Kronius is coming back!" said Prince Chauncey.

As if to illustrate his point, a jet of white hot fire made quick work of a nearby chicken house.

Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip ran quickly behind another sturdy structure that looked like a grain storage building.

"All of my life I have had to compete with you," said Sir Phillip. "It was always my goal to win, but you almost always were the better one. If I was stronger, you were faster. If I did a good deed, you would better it. And now, we want the same woman and I intend to win this time!"

"Yeah?" said Prince Chauncey, "Now is a fine time to let jealousy come between us! We are involved in a dragon contest and we may neither survive the

night! By the way, I was always envious of your easy laugh, your love of food and good things, and your ability to tell stories. The women were always more interested in you. And now that I have found the love of my life in Cassandra, you want to take that away from me. I will die before I let you do that!"

"That just may be what Kronius has in mind," Sir Phillip said, as a fireball hit the storage building and ignited it. "Do you know where the safest place to be is around fire, Prince Chauncey? In the WATER!"

Sir Phillip grabbed Prince Chauncey and dragged him into the street. There was a drinking trough for horses, and SPLASH! Sir Phillip shoved Prince Chauncey into the water, where he landed on his backside.

"Hope you brought a dry pair of undergarments," laughed Sir Phillip. Prince Chauncey struggled to his feet.

"Do you know what's safer than being in a tub of water? Being DOWN A WELL!!" Prince Chauncey charged Sir Phillip and drove him backwards toward where the public well stood. Sir Phillip hit the low stone wall of the well, and Prince Chauncey was pushing him in the chest, trying to push Sir Phillip toward the edge. Both friends, now enemies, struggled and grunted, as above Kronius wreaked more havoc on the town. Suddenly, Sir Phillip drew his sword and slashed Prince Chauncey deep in the left arm!

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Prince Chauncey groaned and slumped against the well's retaining wall. Sir Phillip fell to his knees.

"Forgive me! Oh no, what have I done? I didn't mean to..." Sir Phillip said, and began to weep.

"Just go!" said Prince Chauncey. "Go back to the castle and speak of this to no one! If King Lyric finds out that you came here and did this he will have you put to death for attacking a Prince."

"But I just lost control of..."

"GO!" shouted Prince Chauncey.

Kronius had lost interest in the two men, and was off terrorizing another village.

Sir Phillip ran back to the castle, tears stinging his eyes. How could he have let his jealousy take over and allow him to injure his best friend? This was unforgivable, and now Prince Chauncey would never be his friend again. Sir Phillip had never felt so low and miserable in his life.

A few minutes later, Prince Chauncey got back to the castle, his shirt wrapped around the bloody wound. Upon seeing the prince alive, Mr. Hillsey went to alert King Lyric. A short time later, the king hurried down the stairs to inquire about the battle.

"You have returned! Did you kill Kronius?" said King Lyric.

"I drew a bit of the dragon's blood, but Kronius still lives." Prince Chauncey said, and motioning toward his left arm. "But he did slash me with his talon, forcing me to give up the fight for the night and retreat back to the safety of your majesty's keep."

"You have fared better than any other man, but still you have disappointed me," said King Lyric.

Prince Chauncey bowed his head. "I am sorry. I have let you and the kingdom down. Worst of all, I have not earned Cassandra."

Prince Chauncey stumbled back to his room to lie down and nurse his arm, which was screaming with pain.

King Lyric was not happy that Prince Chauncey had failed, but was impressed with his courage and toughness. No one had lasted more than a few

minutes in battle against Kronius yet.

Back in his chambers, Prince Chauncey grew dizzy and fainted. The royal healers were immediately called to tend to him. Prince Chauncey remained unconscious for several hours. During that time, the Royal Healers tried as hard as they could to help the wound in Prince Chauncey's arm heal, but all of their efforts were in vain. Sir Phillip came into the room, took Prince Chauncey's cold right hand, and held it. Weeping, he kept whispering to Prince Chauncey to please wake up. While he was unconscious, Sir Phillip never left his friend's side. He would fight back tears as he saw the healers shake their heads as if Prince Chauncey had no hope. There was a soft knock at the door, and Cassandra came into the room. Sir Phillip could see how upset she was to see Prince Chauncey hurt. Jealousy began to steal into him, but he had to face the fact that he had already lost the battle for Cassandra's heart. Cassandra knelt beside Prince Chauncey and wept.

"Will he be alright?" she asked Sir Phillip.

"Yes. I have known him since a child, and he is the toughest man I know. He will be fine."

"Oh, I wish that Daddy wasn't so stubborn," said Cassandra. "Why can't I marry who I want, not just the one who defeats Kronius? I am sorry, Sir Phillip! I know you have to battle the dragon tonight. I do wish you the best of luck. And, if you were to win, I would accept."

Cassandra said this, but as she did, she hung her head and glanced at Prince Chauncey.

"Come, Cassandra," said a soft, female voice. "There is nothing more to be done tonight, and it is well past time to get back to your own chambers."

A girl a few years younger than Cassandra entered the room.

"Sir Phillip, this is my sister Isabella," Cassandra said.

Sir Phillip looked up and saw a very pretty girl with short blond curly hair, plump cheeks, and eyes that were so blue they were almost purple. Isabella was staring directly at Sir Phillip, her head cocked slightly to the side, as if she were studying him. He stood and bowed.

"My lady!"

"Would you mind if I spoke to Sir Phillip alone," Isabella said to Cassandra.

Cassandra stood and left the room. When she had gone, Isabella looked again at Sir Phillip in that funny way, as if she were inspecting an interesting creature.

"I sense a grief deeper than the cut on your friend's arm," Isabella said. "You can speak freely to me. Kronius did not injure your friend, did he? Tell me what really happened."

"How...How do you know that is not a dragon's wound?" Sir Phillip asked.

"I have a gift of reading people's emotions," said Isabella. "Not only do I sense the sadness in you, but guilt. Your secret is safe with me. I can be trusted."

Sir Phillip looked into her eyes and believed. There was understanding there, a softness in her features that made him want to confide in her. He was guilty, and he did have the need to get his feelings out.

"I am not worthy to be Prince Chauncey's friend," Sir Phillip began. "I have always loved and admired him, but secretly I have also been jealous. When we met Cassandra, that jealousy grew. I wanted to be the victor in the dragon contest. I wanted to be the one worthy to marry Cassandra, yet I knew that if anyone could defeat Kronius, it would be Prince Chauncey. And when I saw the way Cassandra looked at him, I felt a rage I had never known before. So, tonight, I left the castle and confronted Prince Chauncey, even as he was fighting the beast. I could not help myself. I could not let him win again! We argued and fought one another even as Kronius was burning the village. In anger, I took my sword and slashed Prince Chauncey's arm. If King Lyric finds out, I shall be put to death."

Isabella stepped toward Sir Phillip and took his hand. "You are a good man at heart, and a brave warrior also. I will not tell father. I hope for the best in your own fight with Kronius."

Isabella turned and left Sir Phillip alone. Sir Phillip went back to Prince Chauncey's side and continued his vigil.

## CHAPTER NINE

When the morning sun broke over the horizon, Sir Phillip went back to his own chambers and lay down. He had to get some rest before he took on Kronius that evening. He could not help it, but he was afraid. Even the sea monster had not disturbed him as much as the great dragon. He only hoped he could survive.

"I will win the dragon contest," he said before falling asleep. "I must. Tonight I will not fight for Cassandra. Instead, I will fight in honor of Prince Chauncey."

That evening, Sir Phillip readied himself for battle. He had made sure his shield was in good shape and sharpened and shined his sword. Cassandra and Isabella met him at the castle's front gate to see him off. They waved and he waved back, and...did he just see Isabella blow him a kiss?

He went out to the village and stood alone in the dirt road. The villagers were either gone from their homes or seeking shelter, as they knew Kronius would come again this night. Then, Sir Phillip heard the beast's fearsome roar and felt the air moving under the dragon's wings as Kronius made his approach. A blast set a store on fire, and another destroyed a small hut.

"Hey, firefly breath! Come after me!" Sir Phillip shouted. Kronius turned his yellow eyes upon him and dove downward toward him. Sir Phillip ran behind a stack of wood that was piled beside a house. A blast of Kronius's fire ignited the pile, but Sir Phillip was safe behind it, crouched down. As Kronius dived low, Sir Phillip stood and stabbed straight upward, tearing through the green scales and making a severe gash in Kronius's underbelly. The dragon roared and flew back toward where Sir Phillip had been, but no one was there. Sir Phillip had taken cover behind the remains of a house that had previously been burned. Kronius landed in the street, as if challenging Sir Phillip. The dragon's back was turned, giving Sir Phillip an opportunity to run up and slash at the green scaled back. Another wound appeared, and Kronius whipped his tail around. It caught Sir Phillip in the side and hurled him into the dirt. His breath was knocked out of him, and he felt that a few of his ribs were broken. He barely managed to roll out of the way to avoid being roasted, as Kronius sent a stream of fire his way. Sir Phillip staggered to his feet and ran as fast as he could toward a storefront that had a few barrels outside on a low porch. As he was diving toward the barrels,

trying to get behind them for cover, Kronius sent a blast that singed Sir Phillip's back.

"AAAAAGH," Sir Phillip shouted in pain. The shirt he was wearing was ruined, and Sir Phillip threw it off. His whole body ached, and he began to doubt he would survive the night. Kronius sent another fireball toward where Sir Phillip crouched. The fireball flew over the barrels and blew out the front of the store. Sir Phillip was desperate. He had to find a way to get back at Kronius, but all he could do right now was cower. If he made a charge on the dragon, he would be roasted medium well. He looked behind him where the store's front was now a pile of ash. He could not believe his luck. The store was an armory! He crouched as low as possible and ducked into the armory. There were weapons of all kinds, including several swords, maces, spears, bow and arrows, and YES! Crossbows! Sir Phillip grabbed one, picked up several bolts, and loaded one into the crossbow's slot. He could not handle the crossbow and still use his sword and shield, so he dropped them on the floor. He leaned against the ruins of the armory's front wall, leaned out, and fired the bolt at Kronius. MISSED! He loaded another one, took a shot, and this one pierced the dragon's scales. Kronius shook and the bolt fell out, but the sharp projectile had done some more damage. Another jet of flames ignited more of the storefront. Sir Phillip was forced to abandon the armory and run for safer cover. He fired another bolt that missed again, and ran toward the rock wall that surrounded the garden where he had waited for Prince Chauncey the night before. He jumped over the low wall, loaded another bolt into the crossbow, and took a shot. It hit Kronius in the right wing. Kronius roared and flew into the air. He went straight up, high into the night sky. At the height of his flight, he dove at full speed toward the ground. Right before he landed, he flipped over, claws downward, and smashed the rock wall. Sir Phillip ran into the garden, into the rows of corn, where he would be difficult to see. Kronius blew another flame burst and now fire and smoke filled the air. Sir Phillip had to leave the smoldering garden before the fire consumed him. He shot another bolt at Kronius, but the smoke blurred his vision, and it went too far to the right. Sir Phillip only had one bolt left, then he would have to go back to the armory for more. As he fled the garden, Kronius spotted him and swiped at him. The sharp claws grazed him in the chest, and blood seeped down the front of his torso. He would have scars for life, that is if he had a life after this. He was in severe pain, and running out of options. He had wounded Kronius, but the dragon was still strong. Phillip sprinted in a blind rush toward the rock wall surrounding the well, and Kronius sent a hot fireball his way. To avoid it, Sir Phillip had to jump into the horse trough he had pushed Prince Chauncey into. He splashed into the cool water, where it helped soothe the



burning on his back. He struggled back to his feet, only to see Kronius directly in front of him. He started to load the crossbow, but realized with sudden shock that he had dropped his last bolt as he ran. He had no weapon and no shield. Kronius had him trapped. Sir Phillip closed his eyes and hoped that his death would come quickly. Just then, he heard Kronius roar loudly. He opened his eyes and saw Prince Chauncey behind the dragon, the beast's blood dripping from his sword. Prince Chauncey's injured arm was heavily bandaged, but he handled his sword in the right hand, so he was still able to swing with all his strength. Kronius turned around to face this new attack, and as he turned, Prince Chauncey took his sword and stabbed Kronius through his right eye. The sword went straight through to the dragon's brain. With a tremendous shriek, the dragon bucked and shuddered. Then, with a giant THUD, Kronius crashed to the ground, dead.

## CHAPTER TEN

Sir Phillip rushed toward Prince Chauncey and grabbed him in a hug.

"OW, my arm!" Prince Chauncey groaned.

Sir Phillip let go of Prince Chauncey. "I have never been so glad to see you! What are you doing here?"

Prince Chauncey smiled. "I couldn't let you have all the fun! Besides, I was worried about you. I could not bear losing my best friend."

"My prince, I do not deserve to be your friend after I attacked you last night," Sir Phillip said.

"Nonsense," Prince Chauncey said. "We have always been best friends, and it will take much more than a cut to tear us apart."

Prince Chauncey took his sword, went to where Kronius lay, and cut off one of the dragon's front claws. He brought it back to Sir Phillip and said, "Here. Take this back to show King Lyric as proof that Kronius is dead. Say nothing about my being here. He will declare you the winner of the dragon contest, and you shall marry Cassandra."

As he said this last part, a tear fell from Prince Chauncey's eye.

"But, you are in love with Cassandra," Sir Phillip said.

"You always wanted to be a prince," said Prince Chauncey. "Now here is your chance." With that, he walked back toward the castle.

When Sir Phillip arrived back at the castle with Kronius's claw, everyone came awake and began to celebrate. Dancing and cheering, they praised Sir Phillip. Sir Phillip was smiling, but secretly he felt like a fool. He would be dead if Prince Chauncey had not saved him. King Lyric, Cassandra, and Isabella came down to congratulate him. Prince Phillip noticed that Cassandra's smile was weak, and her eyes downcast.

"Tomorrow, I will announce to the kingdom of Dreamland that Sir Phillip will wed my daughter, Cassandra, and we shall have a celebration feast such as we have never had," said King Lyric. "I will be honored to have you as my new son."

"Your Majesty," said Sir Phillip. "I do not stand before you as the hero worthy of your daughter. I fought Kronius the best I could, but should have been killed. It was Prince Chauncey, who had left the castle, who snuck up on Kronius

when he had me trapped and delivered the strike that felled him. I am sorry. I cannot marry Cassandra."

King Lyric stared at Sir Phillip for a few moments, then said, "It is an honorable thing for you to be honest about what happened. I will allow Prince Chauncey to marry Cassandra instead. However, you are still a worthy warrior. Is there anything you may like as a reward for your efforts?"

"Yes," said Sir Phillip. "I would ask your permission to marry your younger daughter, Isabella."

Isabella let out a shriek of happiness and hugged her sister.

"Of course you may," said King Lyric. "We will have double the celebration! We are free from the scourge of the dragon!"

The celebrations in the kingdom of Dreamland lasted for two weeks. Songs and poems were read and sung by minstrels about the heroic deeds of Prince Chauncey and Sir Phillip. The double wedding ceremony was an event unlike any had ever seen, and the parties lasted long and loud throughout the night.

Prince Chauncey and Cassandra stayed in Dreamland for a month. Finally, they said goodbye to everyone and made plans to go take their place as heirs to the throne of Cloveland. Sir Phillip, now officially Prince Phillip of Dreamland, hugged them both as they prepared to leave.

"There will always be friendship between our kingdoms," said Prince Chauncey. "If you are ever in need here, we will always send help. After all, we are and always have been, a team."

"And what a team we make," said Prince Chauncey.

With that, Prince Chauncey and Cassandra left for Cloveland, and Prince Phillip and Princess Isabella began their new life together in Dreamland.

**And...you know what comes next! THEY ALL LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER!**

**THE END**

## **Acknowledgements:**

This book would not have been possible if it was not for several people who have encouraged me along the way. I would like to thank my parents for their support and for taking the time to read my manuscript. Thanks to my grandmother, Sherry Jacks, for the wonderful book cover. She is an outstanding artist! Special thanks goes to Doug Gray, my mentor, for encouraging me to publish this book and also my readers for taking the time to read this book. Lastly, I thank God for giving me the inspiration and creativity to write a short story and more stories to come.

## **About the Author:**

Lauralee Jacks has recently graduated from St. Mary's College of California with a degree in Liberal Arts. She is currently in graduate school working on her masters in elementary teaching. She lives in Fayetteville, TN. You can follow her on Facebook and on Twitter .

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